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AUTHOR Sterling, Carol; Burke, Fred G.

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ABSTRACT

Courses in the arts should be part of the vocational curriculum. Not only is knowledge of the arts basic to what it means to be an educated person, but the way arts courses are taught also has a natural synergy with vocational education. Arts education naturally embraces methods that are characteristic of high-performance schools. For example, art departments often accept and evaluate students on the basis of portfolios and auditioned performances. In addition, coaching and assessing progress are done continuously in the midst of practice, performance, or critiques. Arts education can help prepare young people in vocational education to become tomorrow's employees and entrepreneurs. A postindustrial society increasingly requires that workers at all levels be creative thinkers, problem solvers, able to work well with others as well as independently, and arts education offers possibilities to complement and supplement training in these skills. The inclusion of arts in education can help to impart the knowledge, insights, and ways of learning that children need to become whole human beings and compete effectively in the world economy. (KC)

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centerfocus

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND ARTS EDUCATION: AN IMPORTANT SYNERGY

Courses in the arts should be part of the vocational curriculum. Not only is knowledge of the arts basic to what it means to be an educated person; the way arts courses are taught has a natural synergy with vocational education. Arts education naturally embraces methods that are characteristic of high-performance schools. For example, art departments often accept and evaluate students on the basis of portfolios and auditioned performances. In addition, coaching and assessing progress are done continuously in the midst of practice, performance, or critiques. Moreover, the arts are an especially good vehicle for teaching about improving quality.

This *CenterFocus* is organized in the following way:

- First, we forthrightly declare our bias.
- Second, we discuss the long-neglected fundamental congruity between the vocational education and arts education communities.
- Third, we examine the relationship between the radically changing employee characteristics required by the emerging 21st century economy and the implications of these changes for improved coordination between vocational and arts education.
- Finally, we examine those conditions conducive to collaboration between vocational and arts education teachers and make some recommendations for the ways in which the two fields can strengthen their relationship with each other.

Declaring Our Bias

Many educators believe that the study of the arts (dance, music, theater and the visual arts) is a "nice thing" for their students to do; a kind of finishing touch to a solid foundation of skills training and academic courses. They feel that what prepares their students for the "real world" of postsecondary education and the workplace is the study of traditional core subjects, such as English, social studies, math and science, as well as training in specific skills. We agree that these subjects are critical. But we want educators to consider the benefits and value of a serious study of the arts as a complement and supplement to existing skills training as one of the best ways to educate young people for postsecondary study and work. The process of studying and creating art involves many of the qualities that are central in today's education reform movement—creativity, a sense of high standards, and a striving for excellence.

Arts Education. The arts education curriculum encompasses dance, music, theater, and the visual arts as they are presented in classes in dance and movement; general, choral and instrumental music; creative dramatics, theater, opera, and play writing; two- and three- dimensional fine arts and design, and additional options. These are substantive and intellectual disciplines. The arts are included as a core area of study, in which American students are expected to achieve competency, in the National Education Goals, which state that, by the Year 2000..."All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, Mathematics, Science, Foreign Language, Civics and Government, Economics, *Arts*, History and Geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy" (National Education Goals Panel, 1991). The significance of this is that our country has made a commitment that the arts should be a part of quality education for every child.

National Standards and Assessment in Arts Education. Building on the inclusion of the arts in the national goals are the voluntary National Standards for Arts Education. They serve as guides for states, districts and schools to set their own instructional goals. Further, the development and implementation of assessments of the arts education standards is part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) currently underway for grades 4, 8 and 11 throughout the country. In fact, many of the assessments in the NAEP test for all subject areas build on the use of performance-based evaluations of competence that have been used by the arts for years.

Arts as a Component in the Core of Learning. The implementation of the National Standards for Arts Education and their related assessment underscores the fact that the arts are serious and rigorous academic subjects—an essential aspect of human knowing. When we speak about arts education we mean that instruction is provided by qualified arts education specialists working in collaboration with professional artists, arts organizations, and cultural and community institutions to bring the arts to students as participants and spectators. These professionals provide a curriculum that includes: engaging students in the processes of creating and producing works of art, guiding students in interpreting and evaluating work by others, providing students with knowledge of and appreciation for the arts, and offering all students an opportu-

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nity to participate in various art forms. It also provides experiences that build teamwork and training for leadership as it helps young people sharpen their skills in critical thinking and creative problem solving.

The study and practice of the arts also helps students meet broad educational goals. It helps them develop, foster and perpetuate cultural values. As students explore the role of creativity in human life and the connections between individual and cultural expression, they gain an understanding of the finest achievements of human expression. And as they explore art forms it helps them to expand avenues for personal self-expression. But perhaps most important of all, students educated in the arts will become citizens who will be literate about their own culture as well as appreciate the contributions of other cultures.

Vocational Education and Arts Education: An On- and Off-Again Relationship

During the early and mid years of this century, vocational education was known as "Industrial Arts." The shift from industrial to vocational paralleled the gradual decline of first a predominantly agricultural and then a smokestack industrial economy. During the same era the arts were perceived as desirable but marginal to a basic skills-oriented curricula, which evolved essentially to equip a generation of young men to follow in their fathers' footsteps.

Pre World War II and The Depression Era: An Ad Hoc Bond. Before World War II, "industrial arts" and arts education had no formal, institutional connection, but they often existed in close proximity to one another. The prototypical secondary school was relatively small and relatively rural. Teachers tended to know each other well and thus were inclined to see the usefulness of cooperative endeavors. Repairs to band instruments, for example, were likely to be undertaken in the school "shop" by industrial arts teachers and their students.

A paucity of art supplies in the depression era also led to cooperative arrangements, thus an enhanced knowledge of each others' programs, activities and students. School plays, musical performances, art exhibitions, and athletic events with band performances frequently brought faculty and students from industrial and arts education together. Even though it was uncommon for these relationships to be highly structured or institutionalized, the net result was an appreciation of each others' resources and activities.

In contrast to teachers of the "core" curriculum—English, math, social studies and science—industrial arts and arts education teachers sensed a mutual understanding of the importance of process in the creation of a product, an appreciation of elaborate sequencing, a valuing of cooperative teamwork in project-oriented work, an acknowledgment of the value of uniqueness and adaptation as contrasted to rigid conformity, and a mutual respect for the concrete and the visual as well as the abstract and the conceptual.

Post World War II: The Great Divide. Following World War II, an emphasis on increasingly sophisticated technology began to sever these informal connections between industrial arts and the arts. Industrial arts, of necessity, evolved into vocational education. The urban orientation of heavy industry, coinciding with a historic migration of families from farms and rural areas to the cities, gave rise to larger and increasingly more specialized secondary schools. As a consequence, the pre-war, ad hoc cooperative relationship between industrial arts and arts education educators atrophied. Indeed, the war effort gave impetus to the development of distinct, and often separate, vocational educational faculties and facilities. Accompanying apprenticeship programs also tended to further isolate vocational education students from the rest of the student body.

A post-war, increasingly sophisticated and high-tech-oriented industry demanded ever more precisely and less broadly prepared employees. The shift away from labor-intensive blue-collar manufacturing jobs to relatively white-collar service-industry employment also tended to weaken the social and economic power of the nation's labor unions. This, in turn, tended to diminish the competitive position of vocational education within the school and school board politics.

The post-war era also coincided with an extraordinary growth in the number of secondary school graduates who continued their education in colleges and universities. Indeed, the fundamental purposes of secondary education began to shift from preparing graduates for employment in labor-intensive industries to preparing them for higher education. Thus, it is not surprising that available resources tended to shift away from both vocational education and arts education. In fact, whenever the budget hatchet was unsheathed it was not difficult to predict with considerable assurance that either or both the vocational education and arts education programs would be (and still are) placed in jeopardy. Increasingly, students from both areas of study were perceived as somewhat second class and, for whatever reason, were often deemed "unsuited" or "unable" to aspire to postsecondary careers.

Ironically, this increased isolation of vocational education and arts education occurred at a most unfortunate moment in the nation's history. For the emerging post-industrial, service-oriented economy

generated not only new "vocations" in the conventional sense but generated an explosion of arts-related and arts-oriented careers as well. Thus, just at the critical moment when the shared philosophy and concepts could have contributed to an enhanced capacity of both vocational education and arts education to respond to the demands of an emergent 21st century economy, they became further estranged and isolated.

The Demands of the 21st Century Economy—SCANS Skills

The Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, widely known as the SCANS Report, underscores the role of the arts in preparing students for the workplace. Created for the purpose of defining occupational skill standards, SCANS stresses competencies that are in fact the hallmark of a solid arts education. These competencies include: the ability to manage resources, interpersonal skills of cooperation and teamwork, the capacity to acquire and use information, and the ability to master different types of symbol systems. SCANS emphasizes the importance of using a variety of technologies, and here again the arts abound in opportunities (U.S. Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991).

The Arts—A Growing Part of the 21st Century Economy. Students who study and practice the arts have an increasing potential of getting jobs in the arts and in arts-related fields. It is an industry that provides about 1.3 million jobs per year. In short, the arts are now a business, one that has room for a wide variety of careers. An astonishing array of arts- and design-related jobs and career opportunities is available in nearly every industry. There are jobs in fashion, retailing, manufacturing, advertising and marketing, commercial and graphic arts, carpentry and scenic design, exhibit design, theatrical lighting, architecture and interior design, horticulture, landscape and floral design, culinary arts, travel and tourism, television production, multimedia production, publishing, museums, theaters, auction houses, photo studios—the possibilities are unlimited.

Indeed, the 1996-97 edition of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* indicates that employment of visual artists (especially graphic designers for products and materials, advertising, marketing, television and set design) and performing artists (actors, directors, producers, dancers, choreographers, musicians, writers and editors) is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2005 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1996). It is no wonder that the Education Commission of the States estimates that in a classroom of 30 children, as many as 10 will eventually be employed in an arts-related occupation (Loyacono, 1992).

Increase in Arts Attendance. Increased leisure time, higher standards of living, and educational attainment have fueled a public demand for recreational and other arts-related activities and opportunities. In 1992, attendance at arts events was four times larger than the attendance for sporting events (Boston, 1995). As noted in the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 1993), there has been a cultural boom as attendance has increased in arts events from 1982 to 1992. During that decade, attendance increased significantly at theater productions (28%), art museums (37%), art/craft fairs (18%), jazz performances (25%), ballet (26%), and opera (35%). Inevitably, as attendance has increased for these events, so have the opportunities for students in arts and arts-related careers and jobs.

A New Synthesis of Vocational and Arts Education Careers. Another significant trend is the growing interest among more affluent and better educated Americans with what frequently is referred to as "crafts," with the result that the distinction between, for example, 'carpentry' and 'wood sculpture' has become less pronounced. Sculpture requires a knowledge of materials, sophisticated tools and procedures that are increasingly associated with contemporary vocational education programs. For example, a woodworker who designs fine original furniture may choose to incorporate design, techniques, and materials from sculpture that marry both forms. As with most contemporary artists, he or she anticipates creating not only functional but aesthetically unique products. Even in such seemingly less artistically oriented vocations as the culinary arts, the trend is toward adaptation, creativity and aesthetics.

Furthermore, today's successful vocational education student increasingly approximates a distinctively educated youth possessed of his or her own tailored career orientation and capabilities. And these careers require more than technical skills; they require the ability to make presentations about their work. Schools that integrate the arts with skills training help students develop the perseverance, self-motivation, pride in their craft and self-confidence that they need in the new economy. One such school, Hodgson Vocational-Technical High School in New Castle County, Delaware, requires all seniors to make a formal public presentation demonstrating mastery of their subject. To help students reach this level of ability, teachers at Hodgson at all grade levels incorporate teaching techniques used in rigorous arts classes: working in groups, developing group critiques about process as well as product, and presenting a public defense of one's position on a particular topic.

One has only to scan the current high school vocational education curriculum to discover that increasingly the trend is away from such traditional job-specific areas as wood-working, auto mechanics, and welding, and towards more broadly based categories that "cluster" the growing number of specialized distinctive skills. Importantly, they more often than not today require one degree or another of computer capability.

Some Aspects of a New Voc/Arts Education Collaboration

If indeed a convincing argument can be made for the need to prepare our youth for new kinds of careers, many of them directly or indirectly arts-oriented, what can we as vocational and arts educators do to further this goal?

Both arts and vocation education professions are well organized and influential at the national and state levels. In our judgment, both sectors should initiate ongoing dialogues to further explore the ideas generated herein. At the local level it is important that arts and vocational educators become more familiar with each other's day-to-day tasks and challenges. If we are to more precisely identify shared interests and strategies it will be necessary that we seek to structure frequent communication and develop cooperative programs. Obviously, we need to become more familiar with each other's curricula, organizational structure, professional development opportunities, literature and research. This end could be partially obtained by a systematic sharing of information about these topics as well as about computer programs and instructional materials.

As the changing economy demands ever new skills and workplace attributes, the availability of related funding should also increase. The current emphasis on school-to-career and school-to-work opportunities, apprenticeships, and mentorships should give impetus to cooperative requests for funding for innovative programs, including those with arts features. Additionally, interest in and support of school reform and restructuring plans and strategies provide new opportunities for shared ventures. For example, the school reform ideas suggested by the "Nine Common Principles" of the Coalition of Essential Schools have been adapted in more than a thousand schools across the country, and many of them can be met through arts education.

We urge colleagues to link their mutual goals with funding sources such as Elementary and Secondary School Title Programs, State Department of Education Goals 2000 funding for Professional Development, and the many and various planning efforts for school reform.

Conclusion

Arts education, that aspect of the curriculum that focuses directly on creativity as well as thinking skills and problem solving, can help prepare young people in our vocational education schools to become tomorrow's employees and entrepreneurs. A post-industrial society increasingly requires that workers at all levels be creative thinkers, problem solvers, able to work well with others as well as independently. The study and practice of arts education offers exciting possibilities to complement and supplement training in these skills. A strong alliance among vocational educators and arts educators can be a valuable asset for those who care about the educational and economic future of our nation. Now is the time to work together to implement what promises to be one of the most propitious opportunities for our country. In so doing, we will strengthen the educational and economic opportunities for our nation's youth. Indeed, the inclusion of the arts in our children's education can help to impart the knowledge, insights, and ways of learning that our children need to become whole human beings and compete effectively in the world economy.

— Carol Sterling
Director
Goals 2000

— Fred G. Burke
Senior Fellow
Phelps Stokes Fund

Carol Sterling is the Director of the Goals 2000 Project for 15 New York State school districts. She was formerly the Director of Arts Education for the American Council for the Arts. *Fred G. Burke* is a Senior Fellow with the Phelps Stokes Fund and a former Commissioner of Education in New Jersey and Rhode Island.

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National Center for Research in Vocational Education,
University of California at Berkeley

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NCRVE
2030 Addison Street, Suite 500
Berkeley, CA 94720-1674

Our toll-free number is
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National Center for Research in
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University of California at Berkeley

Suite 500
2030 Addison Street
Berkeley, CA 94720-1674

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